

## Voyages to the South Seas: In search of Terres Australes

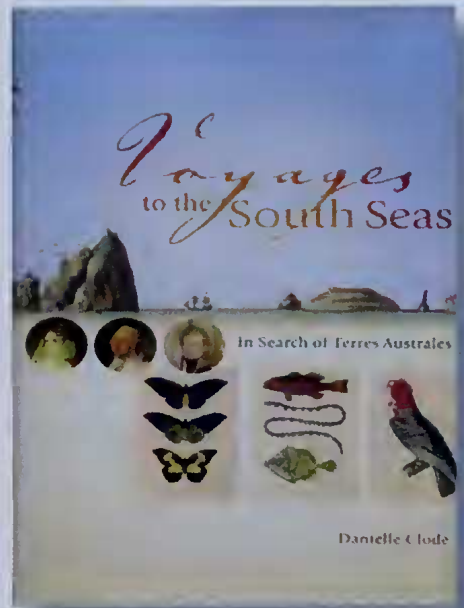
by Danielle Clode

Publisher: *The Miegunyah Press/State Library of Victoria*, 2007. 25 + 315 pages, hardback; ISBN 0522852645. RRP \$26.95

It is sometimes suggested that Australia could have become a French colony, given the extent of activity by French navigators around our coast, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Danielle Clode's excellent recounting of the numerous French expeditions in search of Terres Australes makes it clear, however, that their interests were far from being colonial. Although numerous coastal landmarks now reflect the passing of these French expeditions, there are no remains of French settlements. What led the French to this part of the world was not a desire to establish outposts, but a driving zeal to increase knowledge and understanding in a range of burgeoning scientific fields. The French sought to possess not the country itself, but rather the diverse and previously unrecorded detail that this great south land presented.

The book is organised around four sections, each dealing with a phase of French exploration in the Australia/South Pacific area. These sections are arranged in chronological order, and, in each of them, a collection of stories is told from the perspective of actual participants or their contemporaries. Thus, in the first section, 'Looking for Laperouse: d'Entrecasteaux (1791-1794)' the narration is carried by (in order) Louis XVI, Jacques-Julien Labillardiere, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, E-P-E de Rossel, an unnamed sailor and Joseph Banks. Successive sections focus on 'Picking up shells and catching butterflies: Baudin (1801-1804)'; 'In the footsteps of others: Freycinet (1817), Duperrey (1822-1824) and Bougainville (1824-1825)'; and 'The last great continent: Dumont d'Urville (1826-1829 and 1837-1840)'.

This book is a veritable who's who of scientific and exploratory expeditioners of the time. Many of the names encountered in the narra-



tives, of either central players or individuals mentioned in passing, will be known to readers with an interest in the history of natural sciences, particularly botany. Names such as 'Labillardiere' and 'Banks' now feature largely in the lexicon of Australian botanists; some of the circumstances of how these connections originated are indicated in this volume.

The book is well illustrated, with black and white engravings of each 'narrator' and 32 coloured plates grouped through the volume. These latter images are all drawn from the original published accounts of the voyages, giving them a particular relevance to the text.

My only criticism of this book is the lack of an index. This is a serious deficiency, given the amount of information contained in the book, and makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a reader to easily pick up the numerous connections that exist between the major players in these fascinating episodes in the early history of scientific study in Australia.

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